

Types of homework assigned by elementary teachers

Homework is an important tool that teachers use to help students review and practice what they have learned, to teach children to work independently, and to encourage children to develop good habits and attitudes, such as self-discipline and responsibility. Some argue that the most effective types of homework assignments are those that have a specific purpose, come with clear instructions, are fairly well matched to a student's abilities, and are designed to develop a student's knowledge and skills.

- At least once a week in school year 1994–95, more than 60 percent of public elementary teachers assigned routine exercises, readings, or short writing assignments, while less than 17 percent assigned written reports, problems with no obvious method of solution, or oral reports.
- Public elementary teachers with 3 years or less of teaching experience were more likely than those with 4 or more years of teaching experience to ask students to apply concepts to different or unfamiliar situations, to write a journal entry, and to work on problems for which there was no obvious method of solution at least once a week during the 1994–95 school year.
- Public elementary teachers were more likely than private elementary teachers to assign problems for which there was no obvious method of solution, while private elementary teachers were more likely than their public counterparts to assign routine exercises.
- In school year 1994–95, 49 percent of public elementary teachers reported that their students spent, on average, more than one hour on homework during the week, while 58 percent of private elementary teachers reported that their students spent this amount of time on homework during the week. Six percent of public and 2 percent of private elementary teachers reported that their students spent no time on homework during the week (see supplemental table 36-1).

Percentage of elementary¹ teachers who reported assigning various types of homework at least once a week,² by control of school and years of teaching experience: School year 1994–95

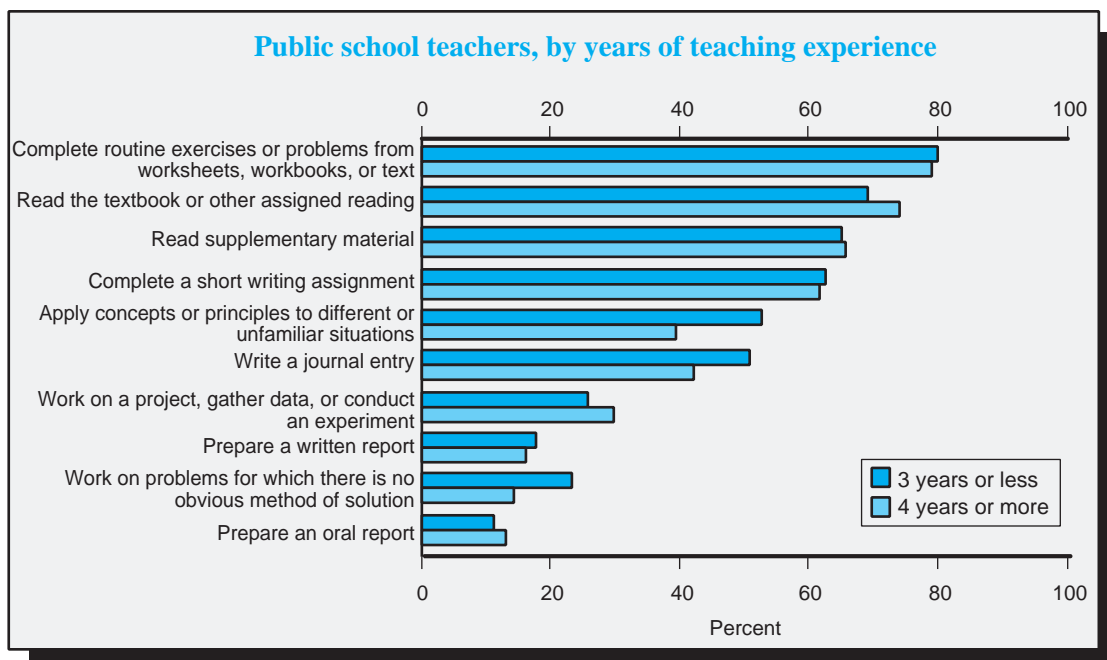
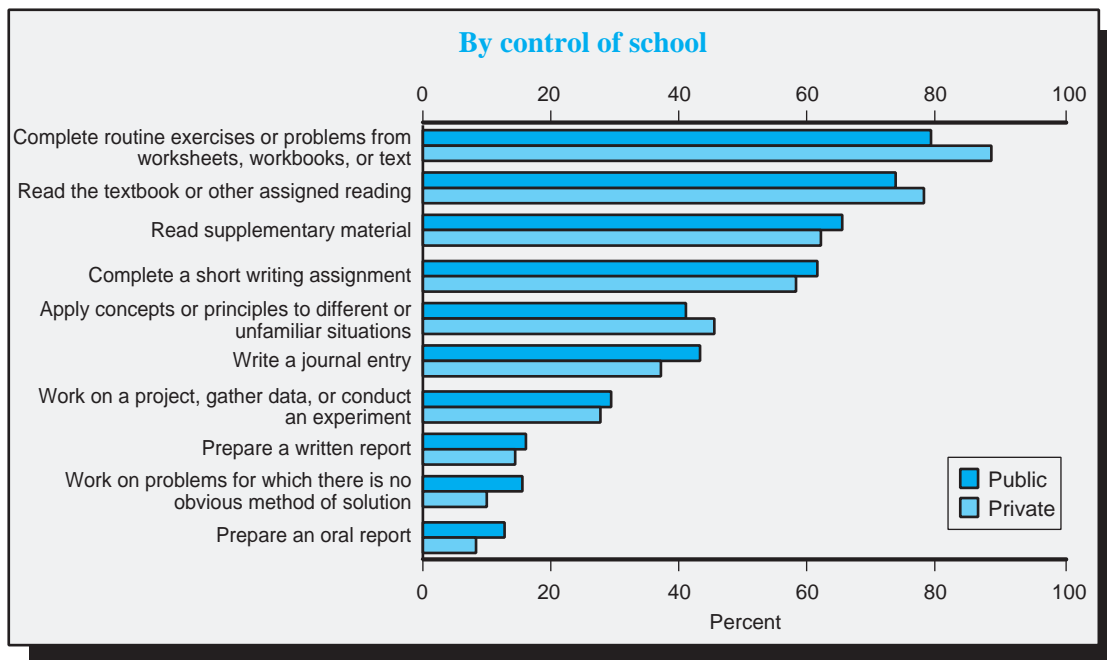
Type of homework assigned	Public			Private		
	Total	Years of teaching experience		Total	Years of teaching experience	
		3 years or less	4 years or more		3 years or less	4 years or more
Complete routine exercises or problems from worksheets, workbooks, or text	79.2	79.9	79.1	88.4	89.0	88.3
Read the textbook or other assigned reading	73.6	69.1	74.2	78.0	81.9	77.2
Read supplementary material	65.7	65.0	65.7	62.3	51.5	64.4
Complete a short writing assignment	61.9	62.8	61.7	58.2	57.4	58.4
Apply concepts or principles to different or unfamiliar situations	41.0	52.9	39.4	45.3	32.3	47.8
Write a journal entry	43.4	50.9	42.4	37.1	34.3	37.6
Work on a project, gather data, or conduct an experiment	29.3	25.8	29.8	27.7	21.6	28.9
Prepare a written report	16.5	17.9	16.3	14.8	10.2	15.7
Work on problems for which there is no obvious method of solution	15.5	23.3	14.5	10.0	10.2	9.9
Prepare an oral report	12.9	11.2	13.2	8.8	9.6	8.6

¹ Includes elementary teachers whose main assignment was teaching "general elementary" and who taught in both the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years; therefore, new teachers were not included in this analysis. See the supplemental note to this indicator for further discussion.

² Includes those teachers who responded "almost every day" and "once or twice a week."

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey, 1994–95.

Percentage of elementary¹ teachers who reported assigning various types of homework at least once a week:² School year 1994–95



¹ Includes elementary teachers whose main assignment was teaching "general elementary" and who taught in both the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years; therefore, new teachers were not included in this analysis. See the supplemental note to this indicator for further discussion.

² Includes those teachers who responded "almost every day" and "once or twice a week."

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey, 1994–95.

Table 36-1 **Average amount of time elementary¹ teachers reported that their students spent on homework during the week and teachers' use of homework during the semester, by control of school and years of teaching experience: School year 1994–95**

Time spent on homework and teachers' use of homework	Public			Private		
	Total	Years of teaching experience		Total	Years of teaching experience	
		3 years or less	4 years or more		3 years or less	4 years or more
Average time spent on homework during the week						
None	5.5	1.7	6.1	1.9	4.4	1.4
1 hour or less	45.5	42.9	45.9	39.7	32.2	41.2
More than 1 hour to 2 hours	26.0	37.1	24.5	29.8	31.0	29.6
More than 2 hours	23.0	18.3	23.6	28.5	32.4	27.8
Percentage of teachers who used ² written homework in the following ways during the previous semester:						
Record only whether assignments were completed	47.7	48.9	47.5	54.4	53.4	54.6
Collect, correct, and keep assignments	41.2	46.7	40.5	52.6	39.5	55.1
Keep items in a student portfolio	35.1	44.3	33.8	37.0	26.6	39.1
Collect, correct, and return assignments to students	72.3	78.3	71.5	81.8	81.4	81.8
Have students exchange assignments and correct them in class	27.0	28.0	26.9	35.4	26.3	37.2
Have students correct their own assignments in class	38.2	35.0	38.6	46.9	33.7	49.4
Use assignments as a basis for class discussion	55.0	50.8	55.6	55.5	45.8	57.4
Use assignments as a basis for grading students	41.4	41.9	41.3	51.3	40.2	53.5
Use assignments as a basis for lesson planning	50.7	47.8	51.1	47.3	34.2	49.8

¹ Includes elementary teachers whose main assignment was teaching "general elementary" and who taught in both the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years; therefore, new teachers were not included in this analysis. See the supplemental note to this indicator for further discussion.

² Includes those teachers who responded "always" and "often."

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey, 1994–95.

Note to Indicator 36: The Teacher Follow-up Survey

The Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) provides information on teachers' movement within and outside the teaching profession in public and private schools. The TFS is a subsample of teachers in the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and is conducted 1 year after each SASS cycle. The third TFS was conducted in the 1994–95 school year; two previous cycles of the TFS were conducted in school years 1988–89 and 1991–92. The survey identifies and collects data from the following groups of teachers who participated in the SASS interview the previous year: 1) those who remained in the teaching profession, including those who remained in the same school and those who moved to another school; and 2) those who left the teaching profession.

The 1994–95 TFS included questions on teaching methods, such as teachers' use of homework. Respondents to the questions on teaching methods were those teachers who taught in both the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years; however, while the teachers surveyed taught in both the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years, the teachers' responses about their teaching methods represent a measure of their actions only in the 1994–95 school year. Since teachers who were surveyed must have taught in both the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years, they do not represent a random sample of the 1994–95 teacher work force. New teachers in the 1994–95 school year were left out of the survey.

Elementary teachers

The TFS questions asked teachers to identify their main teaching assignment. For *Indicator 36*, the elementary teacher category consists of those teachers who responded that their main teaching assignment was "general elementary." The elementary teacher category excluded those elementary teachers who taught special subject areas, such as art, foreign language, science, or special education.

Grouping of responses

Indicator 36 uses responses from three questions taken from the TFS. These questions concern the type of homework elementary teachers assign, the ways in which elementary teachers use written homework, and the average time students spend on homework.

The question concerning the type of homework assigned asked teachers to "indicate the frequency with which you assigned...over the last semester." For this question, respondents' choices were "almost every day," "once or twice a week," "once or twice a month," "once or twice a semester," or "never." In this analysis, the response categories "almost every day" and "once or twice a week" were combined to represent a typical school week.

The question concerning elementary teachers' use of written homework asked teachers to indicate "how often did you do...in the last semester." For this question, respondents' choices were "always," "often," "sometimes," "rarely," or "never." In this case, the "always" and "often" response categories were combined to calculate percentages on how written homework was used during the previous semester.

Finally, the question regarding the amount of time students spend on homework asked teachers to report the average number of minutes students spent on homework during an average school week.

Type of homework assigned	Public			Private		
	Total	Years of teaching experience		Total	Years of teaching experience	
		3 years or less	4 years or more		3 years or less	4 years or more
Complete routine exercises or problems from worksheets, workbooks, or text	1.9	2.6	2.1	1.7	2.8	2.0
Read the textbook or other assigned reading	2.0	3.6	2.2	2.3	4.0	2.8
Read supplementary material	1.9	3.4	2.1	2.2	3.7	2.6
Complete a short writing assignment	2.0	3.3	2.3	2.5	4.2	3.0
Apply concepts or principles to different or unfamiliar situations	1.6	3.4	1.7	2.6	3.5	2.9
Write a journal entry	2.2	3.1	2.5	2.4	3.8	3.0
Work on a project, gather data, or conduct an experiment	2.0	3.5	2.2	2.1	3.3	2.5
Prepare a written report	2.0	2.5	2.4	1.7	2.3	2.0
Work on problems for which there is no obvious method of solution	1.4	3.3	1.7	1.5	1.8	1.8
Prepare an oral report	1.3	2.0	1.5	1.7	2.5	1.9

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey, 1994–95.